

Department of the Interior Rural Fire Assistance Program Administrative Plan

Purpose

The Rural Fire Assistance (RFA) program funds are appropriated by Congress annually. RFA is intended to increase local firefighter safety and enhance the fire protection capabilities of Rural Fire Departments (RFD) by helping RFDs meet accepted standards of wildland fire qualifications, training, and performance for initial and extended attack at the local level. The RFA program supports the overall goals of the National Fire Plan by improving the capacity and capability of local fire departments to protect their communities from the effects of wildland fire.

The RFA program provides funds for RFDs that:

- Protect rural, wildland-urban interface communities,
- Play a substantial cooperative role in the protection of federal lands,
- Are cooperators with the Department of the Interior (DOI) managed lands through cooperative agreements with the DOI or their respective State, and,
- Serve communities with a population of 10,000 or less.

Authority

Activities in this program are derived from the FY 2001 Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, PL 106-291. FY 2001 was the first time the Congress appropriated funds for RFA grants.

Program Administration

- Program priorities and criteria may change with each fiscal year at the discretion of the Secretary.
- The maximum allowable award to each RFD is \$20,000 annually.
- The RFA grant administrative timeline will be determined annually by the DOI bureaus in coordination with OWFC and, to the greatest extent possible, coordinated with the application and review periods established for other federal fire service grant programs.
- Grant announcements will be consistent with applicable sections of Public Law 106-107 (Federal Financial Assistance Management Act of 1999) and Office of Management and Budget policy and guidance.

- Within each State, State compact, region, zone or equivalent, DOI RFA representatives, State Foresters or equivalent, and appropriate partners will review applications, and submit a single prioritized list of RFA grant applicants.
- National DOI RFA leads, in collaboration with partners, will review submissions, and allocate funds to bureaus based on priorities determined by the Secretary and in coordination with partners, cooperating organizations and appropriate stakeholders.

Eligibility Criteria

An RFA/RFD **MUST** meet **ALL** of the requirements below to be considered for DOI RFA grant funding.

- The RFD must be party to an agreement with the State Forester (or equivalent) or Tribe, or a cooperative fire agreement with a DOI bureau (BIA, BLM, NPS, USFWS).
- The RFD must have a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number required for all federal grant applicants. The DUNS number is a unique nine-character identification number available free of charge from Dun & Bradstreet, Inc.
- The RFD serves a community of a population of 10,000 or less, and is in the vicinity of or within the wildland/urban interface.
- The RFD must be in close proximity to DOI lands and communities within the wildland urban interface.
- A local DOI bureau must be dependent on RFD for response to wildfire incidents.
- Other appropriate local or regional criteria.
- The RFD must demonstrate the capability to meet cost share requirements which may include in-kind services. Cooperator contribution may exceed, but not amount to less than 10 percent of the amount awarded. Examples of in-kind services may include, but are not limited to, facility use incurred by an RFD for hosting training courses; travel and per diem costs incurred by an RFD to attend training courses; and administration costs related to purchasing RFA equipment and supplies. **Funding or in-kind resources may not be derived from other federal funding programs.**
- Allowable funding requests are limited, based on annual Secretarial direction, and may include training, personal protection equipment, and programs that are supported by a larger plan (e.g., CWPP, FMP, Local Response Plan) and equipment.

- Funding priorities for grant awards may shift from year to year.
- Local and regional workgroups must use available systems and networks to ensure funding requests are not duplicated by another federal bureau, agency or Tribe.

Evaluation Criteria

Evaluator(s) must utilize general criteria to rank eligible Rural Fire Departments for funding.

- To ensure consistency and compatibility with existing fire service assistance programs, the DOI bureaus, Tribes and State Foresters (or equivalent) will coordinate to cooperatively establish priority ranking of RFA applicants.
- The workgroup must verify each RFD's level of significance (LOS). Factors to be considered in this assessment include:
 - The RFD's proximity to DOI managed lands and protection role for the Wildland/Urban Interface,
 - DOI reliance on the RFD for expedient initial attack in remote DOI areas of responsibility. RFDs in close vicinity to DOI lands may play a major role in initial attack due to their close vicinity, and have a moderate or high level of significance to the DOI,
 - Other local or regional criteria, disclosed in advance to grant applicants.
- State Foresters (or equivalent) must concur with prioritization of funding requests.
- Favorable consideration should be directed to those RFDs that are in compliance with DOI and State regulations; have promptly expended previous funds awarded; comply with monitoring and reporting requirements in timely fashion; and, have been consistent with honoring cost-share commitments.
- The workgroup should evaluate the RFD's relationship in supporting initiatives, direction plans such as the *10-year Comprehensive Strategy* and its *Implementation Plan*, State fire plans, community wildfire protection plans or equivalent(s), and fire management plans.

Reporting of Annual Program Accomplishments

- The DOI bureaus will utilize the National Fire Plan Operations and Reporting System (NFPORS) to enter and store RFA program data.
- All program requests and awards will be consolidated only from NFPORS data. Each bureau is responsible for entering data into the NFPORS database. OWFC will establish time frames for fiscal year requests and quarterly accomplishments.

RFA Program Monitoring and Accountability

- Grants and agreements will be administered in accordance with applicable sections of CFR 43 12.
- Federal Financial System (FFS) or equivalent financial system may be used for further program obligation review and verification.